University of Tartu
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AGAINST THE GUISE OF THE GOOD

Master's Thesis in Philosophy

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research conducted by myself (Bright Dua-Ansah) under the supervision of Francesco Orsi (PhD), and that apart from the works cited herein no other texts are copied nor has this thesis in whole or in part been submitted in this university or another for a degree.

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1

1. Introduction

The question which I propose to answer is briefly this: When we act intentionally, are we always acting under the Guise of the Good? To this, my response is No.

I introduce the Guise of the Good thesis as an account of intentional action in **Chapter 1**. This will enhance our understanding of the arguments that have necessitated this thesis. In **Chapter 2**, I formulate my objection against the Guise of the Good as not necessary for explaining intentional action. I will explore how people can act intentionally without seeing anything good about it. That is to say, the Guise of the Good thesis is false. I provide an analysis of the concepts of intention, justification, agents and intelligibility in the debate of action theory to account for why the Guise of the Good is not required to explain intentional action. In **Chapter 3**, I articulate counterarguments to my critique from the Guise of the Good theorists and other anticipated objections. In **Chapter 4**, I respond to the objections from GG with illustrations and examples. These illustrations aim at demonstrating the different perspectives that highlight the problem as I noted in Chapter 2 as still unsolved by the counterarguments in Chapter 3. I conclude in **Chapter 5** with a summation of the arguments and responses, as well as suggestions on how future discussions may turn out considering the present interest in the standard debate of action theory.

1.1 What is the Guise of the Good?

The Guise of the Good thesis (hereinafter, *GG*) is an account of intentional action. Intentional actions are those that are done by agents who knew what they were doing, and who did those actions under some aspect of the good. As an account of intentional action, *GG* commits itself to explaining why people do what they do: if we did not think what we did was good, we would not do it. This is different from the claim that every action qualifies as intentional action. *GG* theorists admit that not all actions are intentional. Only those actions that are done by agents who understood what they were doing (and why) qualify as intentional action. Explained differently, if we acted in other ways we did not think were under some aspect of the good, those actions would not count as intentional even if we did

them (Raz, 1999). For instance, I am writing at present to argue a thesis. For this action to be intentional I must believe – while writing – that the purpose of writing this thesis is worthwhile, that it is good. Else, why do it?

It is this rudimentary assessment of my action that *GG* is all about. Human beings are capable of intentional action. That is to say, of the possible set of actions a person takes there are those that are intentional and those that are not intentional. So, it is important to understand that *GG* does not claim that every action is an example of intentional action. Only those actions the rational agent did *sub specie boni* (i.e., under the Guise of the Good) qualify as intentional action.[1] In effect, acting intentionally is accompanied by some belief that what one is doing is justified, or more precisely can be justified by them. The agents can understand and even explain to others why they are doing the actions.

One important aspect of *GG* is the motivating aspect of intentional actions. One acts intentionally because they are attracted to do what is (perceived) good. The (perceived) good – hereinafter, just good – is desirable, and as such motivates what rational agents do. As Orsi (2015:714) suggests, intentional action does not appear to be logically possible (given *GG*) without a corresponding desire to do what is good. The justification for any intentional action will be given by the "why" of the desire to do the said action. In other words, when we demand to know the reasons for an intentional action, the agent will point in the direction of the desire to do the good. This will account for why the said action is intelligible to the agent.

1.2 Terminological Distinctions

Already, we notice that such terms as intentions, justification, desire, reasons, rational agent, motivating reasons, explanatory reasons and intelligibility recur in this thesis. I define them as follows:

An action is intentional if the agent understands why they are doing it to be motivated by *GG*. If an action is motivated by *GG* then the agent values the action as good. To understand what an agent is doing, the action ought to have an explanation of why that action was done, i.e., the actions ought to be rational. The distinction between a rational action and

[1] This Latin phrase translates as "under the aspect of the good," although the exact moment GG identified itself with this old idea of action theory is not exactly known. For instance, St. Thomas Aquinas (AD 1225-1275) formulated in Summa the idea that: quidquid apetitur, apetitur sub specie boni, which translates as, "whatever is desired, is desired under a guise of good." (See in Summa Theologiae I-II: 1.6; 8.1). Plato's Socrates had hinted this idea (repeatedly through Gorgias and Protagoras dialogues) when he was made to say that No one knowingly does evil. This sense was much stricter as it encompassed rather all actions, which GG seems not to suggest. In this regard, GG is theoretically distinct.

another action that is not rational is not what makes sense to everybody, but rather what makes sense to the agent. In other words, if the said action makes sense to the agent, it does not matter whether it also makes sense to anyone else. For example: King Leonidas' suicide mission of defending the *Hot Gates* to death is only rational because it made sense to him and his soldiers.[2] Whether you and I still believe it was not rational says nothing about the action being intentional. In a similar manner, the actions of Hamlet are rational so long as they make sense to him. This of course includes "*what dreams may come when we have shuffled off this mortal coil.*"[3]

The reasons for acting intentionally are the "why" of the action (Anscombe, 1963).[4] If an action is intentional, then the agent can offer us the reasons for such an action. The said reasons will answer the "why" of the action. For instance, if I turned left while driving on a highway, an engineer and a neurologist could offer separate reasons for my actions. For the engineer, why I turned left was because I rotated the steering wheel anticlockwise; following this, a corresponding effect in the rack and pinion system of the automobile directed me leftward. For the neurologist, the "why" of my action is the various neural responses that determined my leftward movement. But all of this will not qualify as the reasons for an intentional action under *GG.* It is the reasons of the agent that matter in this account of the action. So, the agent can simply say that she saw a motel while driving and because she wanted to have some tasty food and rest, she turned there. In this regard, none of the technical explanations of the neurologist or engineer surfaced while she was accounting for her actions. Even if they did, those technical explanations will only be as valid as the agent believes them to be the motivating reasons for acting. The details of the "why" will highlight the justificatory and explanatory or motivating reasons for acting.

The good shall be taken herein to denote what is valued highest in deciding to act. So, for instance if I took chocolates instead of a healthy potato meal today (but not always), it simply means I value sweet things at the moment or even the pleasure of eating chocolates

[2] I refer here to the famous Battle of Thermopylae (Θερμοπύλαι) in 480 B.C., which attempted to stop Persian military campaign into Greece. Ultimately, King Leonidas and his soldiers lose the battle as expected and they are all killed.

[3] This line occurs in Shakespeare's tragedy of Hamlet. In the scene that has this quote, the eponymous Hamlet acts consistently out of vengefulness in what appears to be rash decisions: this ultimately leads to his death. See Acts III Scene I of Shakespeare's Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. Applied to GG, only the agent's desires count even if others believe it to be insane.

[4] Anscombe's 1963 Intentions formulates the nature of intentions in the manner as is useful to our present discourse on intentions. But as Orsi (2015) also admits, it is unlikely that Anscombe would subscribe to GG as presently debated.

as opposed to potatoes. It must be understood that this is in no way implying that I do not value health; it just means that at the moment I value pleasure more.

What distinguishes intentions under *GG* apart from other accounts of practical action is the primacy of the agent in deciding what is justified. The justifications for actions are the normative reasons the agent gives for their action. The "why" will factor in an evaluative content whose merit is wholly dependent on what is considered good by the agent. Typically, a rational agent may say: "I chased the alligator because …," where the blank is filled with expressions that have normative validity according to the agent. The place of the agent in the justification of these normative accounts remains constant, i.e., she never ceases to be whose consideration makes the action intentional.

1.3 The Attractions of *GG*

GG is attractive for some features about the theory which other accounts of action theory may ignore. For one, *GG* argues that desires entail an evaluative content: that is to say, whenever we desire to act, that desire is accompanied by a normative justification for that desire.

The normative justification for the desire is what we conveniently lay out to people when they query us about why we did what we did. While most accounts of action theory may subscribe to what has come to be called the magnetic feature of the good, only *GG* capitalises on the power of justification entailed in desire to argue why the good is such a driving force of attraction. In other words, these justifications we have for our desires are calibrated towards value. *GG*'s ability to account for practical actions which also entail an evaluative content is what has merited it scholarly attention.[5]

My interlocutor, Orsi (2015:715), has argued that: "…[*GG*] is held to be more than a contingent generalisation about human beings." What this implies is that granted one is acting intentionally, then it follows without failure that they are acting under *GG*. Think of it this way: If every cat (*felis catus*) is a mammal necessarily, then we are neither talking about 'Most cats are mammals' nor 'A lot of cats are mammals.' We are instead saying 'Every and All cats are mammals.' Likewise, we are not talking about some or most intentional actions; we are talking about all intentional actions.

[5] In fact, More (1903) , McDowell (1985), Korsgaard (1986), Smith (1994), Dancy (2000), and Orsi (forthcoming) have all attempted to demonstrate – like Kant (2015) had earlier shown in his *Critique* and *Groundworks* – that our normative reasons and desires/wants can seamlessly overlap, if not held in constant conjunction.

The possibility of action under the guise of the bad does not contradict *GG*.[6] Raz (2016) has identified the possibility of other guises where a motivation, as his suspicion goes, can be argued to be opposed to *GG* as counter-argument. But it must be noted that this is not what *GG* is saying at all; *GG* does not argue that every possible action is motivated by *GG*. Whether other guises exist – an observation that Stocker (1979) has pointed out – is apart from the focus of the argument for *GG*. To be certain an action is intentional, it must be motivated by *GG*.

The good must attract for *GG* to have the force of motivation. The attraction of the good for rational agents is the reason why we act; there is something about the good that makes us value actions that pursue it. This has simply been termed as the magnetic feature of the good (Stevenson, 1937). As Aristotle (1984), in the opening lines of the *Nichomachean Ethics,* put it: "*Every…action and choice is thought to aim at some good.*" (Book I, 1094a 1).

1.4 The Formal Argument of *GG*

I admit that the strength of the motivating and justificatory reasons may differ depending on which author is being read. If one is given to a moderated connection between justifications and motivations, then *GG* is more open as to whether it is an aesthetic, moral or pragmatic consideration (Scheffler, 2011). For others such as Scanlon (1998)[see also (2014)] and Korsgaard (2009), there is an evaluative content (or *rationalism,* as Kantians prefer to call it) entailed in intentional actions. Like Orsi (*forthcoming*), I formulate my views and critiques from the traditional influences on the latter's works on the subject.

To summarise *GG* formally, we find that the thesis can been argued (*see* Setiya, 2010) for in the manner below:

P1 If an action *x* is intentional, then the agent *A* understands why she did *x.*

P2 If *A* understands why she did *x*, then *A* has her justificatory reasons for doing *x.*

P3 If *A* has her justificatory reasons for doing *x,* then *A* sees *x* under *GG.*

C Therefore, if an action *x* is intentional, then *A* sees *x* under *GG.*[7]

[6] I denote the guise of the bad to be any guise that is motivated by the bad (i.e., valuing what an agent knows to be bad), for the purposes of this essay.

[7] Orsi rejected a biconditional relationship between intentional actions and *GG* as I had formerly thought was the case while reading him and Setiya. So instead of "An action is intentional if and only if it is motivated by *GG*," I rather go with "If an action is intentional, then it is motivated by GG." The reason is because in most cases *GG* is not always sufficient for an action to account as intentional, whereas on the other hand an action which is intentional is of necessity an action motivated by *GG.*

In this Chapter, we learned about *GG* as an account of intentional action. Not only does it describe what people are doing when they act intentionally, but that they would otherwise not pursue an intentional action if they did not think it was good. This makes it easy for us to account for actions that are intentional since the justifications and explanations for the said action square perfectly with what the agent values (such as what we see in ethical actions of people). In **Chapter 2**, I proceed to argue why I do not think the theory succeeds.

CHAPTER 2

2 That *GG* is false

In Chapter 1, we acquainted ourselves with *GG* as an account of action theory. It simply posits rational agents as pursuers of value, and that in the absence of the justificatory and the motivating reasons that undergird an agent's *reasons* for acting, they otherwise would not commit an intentional action. I argue that as a necessary explanation for action, *GG* is false: that is to say, it is not the case that *if an action x is intentional, then A sees x under GG.*[8] My rejection of *GG* is formulated in two objections: I argue, that

1. Some conceivable intentional actions are not motivated by *GG.*
2. *GG* gives too much power to the agent.

The first objection is targeted at *P3* in the formal structure of the argument for *GG*. [9] Agents can understand and justify their actions but will sometimes see nothing good about it, contrary to what *GG* suggests they must necessarily do. I will proceed to *Objection 2* by evaluating the ontology of intentions and how it adumbrates the justificatory reasons for acting. The aim of *Objection 2* is to argue that *GG* cedes too much power to the agent and this freedom poses a significant threat to *GG*.

2.1 Objection 1: That Some Intentional Actions are not motivated by *GG*

Due to the necessary relationship between *GG* and intentional actions, it has been argued that there can exist no such intentional actions that are not motivated by *GG.* A common theme seems to run through Plato's Socrates who, unlike our present discussion, made it a matter of fact to act intentionally under *GG.* In *Protagoras 358d*, Socrates is credited to have said:

> It is not in human nature, apparently, to do so—to wish to go after what one thinks to be evil in preference to the good; and when compelled to choose one of two evils, nobody will choose the greater when he may the lesser.[10]

From this perspective, it is a matter of psychological fact that the person capable of evaluating their actions will not choose anything but the good, because that is what

[8] See the conclusion, C, in 1.4 above.
[9] P2, or Premise 2 states that: If A understands why she did x, then A has her justificatory reasons for doing x.
[10] Plato: Complete Works (1997).

possessing the mental faculties that allow for rational action means. No one knowingly does evil, it is said, and bad actions are the result of ignorance. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) similarly argued human nature as rationally guided *will*, thereby making a diabolical *will* an impossibility. The Kantian Constructivist, Christine M. Korsgaard (2009), in like manner suggests that choices reflect value, thereby necessarily implicating *GG*.

My question for this subchapter is this: can you imagine a person who acts intentionally but may not see anything good about their motivations and justifications? I believe so. This subchapter is dedicated to convincing you about the frequency of this possibility.

To account for *GG* as necessary for any intentional action *x,* then doing *x* must be seen as good, although *x* itself must be motivated or justified. Drawing on Anscombe (1963), the ability to account for motivations and justifications together is what forms the causal factors that the agent can admit as explanatory for their action. These reasons are argued to be necessarily tied to *GG.* Without this necessary connection to *GG*, argues Raz (1999), the explanations for actions would not be fully intelligible. However, it is quite too easy to imagine the kind of agent who has a motivating reason or a justificatory reason but still does not think *GG* is necessary to account for their action. Let us consider the example on p. 91 that Setiya (2010) gives:

A man runs from a burning house that still contains his family. When asked about why he ran, he will say that the house was burning and that he feared for his life. He has the perfect combo for the "why" of the action: the motivating and justificatory reasons for acting. But does he think this was motivated by the aspect of the good? Not quite! He may say that he was even a coward for running since his wife and daughter were still in the house and that it was not good at all for leaving them behind.

This possibility seems to be more likely than is credited. People can perfectly account for their actions without seeing them as good. Other similar counterexamples have been given by Raz (2002: 24,25; 2010: 84) to illustrate this. For instance he mentions an agent who takes tea because they believe it is supported by the fact that Sophocles was an ancient Greek poet (Raz, 2010: 97). Anscombe's agent who eats a saucer of mud is also a classic instance: people acting in quite strange ways that do not seem about right to expect of rational agents, and more so, the agents themselves do have shaky convictions about the goodness of the act.

There, however, is one question that remains unanswered with these examples: what is the scope of *GG* that these examples aim to confute? As Setiya (2010) rightly noticed, the

scope of *GG* can be stretched to include any other value that the agent is attracted by. In that sense, even Milton's Satan will be acting under *GG*. In *Paradise Lost* (Milton, 2000), we are introduced to a parody of the biblical character Satan who revels in contrariness. One way of looking at this problem if you are a *GG* theorist is to loosen the scope of *GG* to include Satan's desires. One could still argue that Satan enjoys the confusion and sees it as good. Namely, he values chaos or the pleasures derived therefrom. One can also view it this way: spiting God is what Satan values.[11]

What the Satan example fails to account for is the type of agent who does not believe in the pleasures they are deriving as being good. In the examples, at least the agents did believe they were doing it under some aspect of the good. This will of course include the agents who act under false facts such as what Orsi (2015:714) mentions: pouring the wrong solution on your itching eye believing it will alleviate your discomfort. This will be a "mistake of fact", as Anscombe's saucer of mud would be to the agent who *values* eating a saucer of mud. It will be as similar to Mithridatism as would a person counting grass: they will be committed to *intentional actions* that makes us all wonder what they think "value" is.[12] But what if we have an agent who acts intentionally but does not see the action committed under some aspect of the good? Would she not be different from the person who merely is mistaken?

She would be different. The distinction lies in the fact that one agent may calibrate their motivations and justifications whereas the other will not. For instance, if Orsi were told that the eye-drop container was filled with glue or ink, he would no longer see the act of pouring the solution on his eye as good (and will therefore stop), all things being equal. But the agent who acts intentionally but does not see anything good about the action will not change merely because they were told the actions are not what they suppose it to be – motivated by *GG.* Whereas Setiya suggested it is the pleasure derived from the contrariness that motivates Satan's actions, I hold that Satan does exactly what he does because those actions are bad. Otherwise, he should also do what is considered good because sometimes it also gives pleasure! The reason is because the God whom he despises sometimes "makes peace and creates evil." Like He proudly affirms: "*I the Lord do all these things.*"[13] So it is

[11] This particular view has been preferred by James Pearson (reviewer) as a more accurate interpretation of Satan's actions in *Paradise Lost.*

[12] Mithridates VI was a king of Pontus in ancient Greece who feared assassination by poisoning so much that he sought to immunize himself by taking poison in nonlethal bits.

[13] See in Isaiah 45:7 in the King James Bible. This seems even more consistent with the Nietzschean idea that the Devil is merely the leisure of God.

not the case that despising God is the what the devil merely values, else he will have to do the good when God commits to the evil. But this will be out of character for the Satan depicted throughout religious literature and in Milton's work. The more consistent character is a commitment to evil because that is what he believes will spite God most of the time.

Studies suggest that people who do random good things for total strangers are 23% happier with their lives.[14] We have a consistent image drawn from religious literature of a person who purely desires evil.[15] Now, if Satan will not calibrate his motivations and justifications just because alternate facts about pleasure were laid out to him, why suppose that he cannot understand and justify his actions without seeing anything good about his actions?

In everyday life, we can encounter people who admit doing things they desired and were motivated to do although they saw nothing good about it. As Stocker (1979) also points out, people can admit fine that they do not see the good in their actions yet want to do it.

One question that arises with this possibility is whether these people are acting rationally at all since they see nothing good in their actions. To answer this question, we must take a step back to what we discussed earlier about who rational agents are, and what makes their actions intentional actions. In subchapter ***1.2***, we learned that rational agents are those who can understand what they are doing and can justify their actions. So, for instance, "Why did Dr. Faust do that?" will be followed by a normative justification and some motivating explanations for the action. We noted also that it is these rational agents who can act intentionally. More importantly, what makes the actions rational is not because you and I find it so, but because the agents in question found it rational to do. Applied to Stocker's agent, why we find the actions unjustifiable is not relevant. If the agent finds motivation and justification enough for their actions, then the action qualifies as intentional action.

However, the problem with this is that the agents we are dealing with do not find the actions justifiable themselves. So now, for the first time, we encounter not only a gap between intentional actions and *GG*, but also a problem with the content of intentional action. By the last phrase I mean, that there can be an asymmetry or split between motivating and justificatory reasons for acting. An agent may feel motivated to act but does not find it justified, and the opposite is true. Together, they refute premise 2 and 3 in the formal argument for *GG* presented before. This whole paragraph restated, I argue that

[14] For a discussion on this issue, see more sources and researches here (Staff, 2019).
[15] Cf. Job 1:7; John 8:44; Acts 13:10; Ephesians 6:11; 1 Peter 5:8. Also, in Book IV of Paradise Lost, Satan says: Evil, be thou my good.

1. An agent can act intentionally without finding anything good about it, and
2. An agent may have only motivating reasons for acting, but not justificatory reasons; and this challenges *P2* in the argument for *GG.*

The issue with (1) has been adequately discussed in the previous paragraphs. Let us think briefly about (2).

Psychological states and moods can affect what one finds motivating or justificatory. Rational agents are not precisely a sort of geometric figure that has a stable description; they are human beings with tastes and desires that change over time.[16] Unlike humans, it is impossible that we should find a plane figure with three sides that is not a triangle, or the shortest distance between two points on a plane that is not a straight line. The semantic rules that describe the figures forbid such exceptions. If you are plane figure and have sides more or less than three, you cannot be a triangle. But rational agents seem to be different in this regard. People change their minds all the time, even while acting rationally though they admit their earlier motivations carried more normative weight than what they presently harbour. This explains why people feel ashamed, sorry, regretful, and even sinful among the religiously inclined. Let us look closer at the instance of shame.

People who feel shame often were motivated enough to do something they do not find justifiable. This justification may not necessarily be moral, but even aesthetic or pragmatic. Either way, they had the urge to commit an action which they are not happy about because it is not justified. Note, that we are not merely talking about the consequences of the action, but the justification for the action. Also, shame (properly speaking) occurs with intentional actions: if the action was not intentional and one felt uneasy about its consequences (such as when you sneeze and spread covid coincidentally), that will not constitute shame per se. Cases where people feel shame such as squandering public funds or not taking responsibility for their children occur because in such situations they were motivated to do those actions absent an acceptable justification (even by their standards). This is contrary to what *P2* says: that if an agent understands why they are acting intentionally, then it means they also have justifications for it.

It becomes disingenuous for the *GG* theorist to undermine the agent's reasons if the agents themselves admit that they do not believe the actions were motivated by *GG.* The origin of this problem, i.e., the *GG* theorist allowing all intentional actions to be under *GG* versus the agents themselves rejecting *GG,* can be attributed to the fact that *GG* cedes too

[16] For extended discussions on this point, see Velleman (2000).

much power to the agent. This problem introduces us to my second objection: *GG* gives too much power to the agent.

2.2 Objection 2: That Only the Agent's Reasons Count

"If an agent judges that it would be better to do x than to do y," argues Davidson (1980), "then he wants to do x more than he wants to do y" (cf p. 23). Of course, *x* may involve eating at Guy Savoy while *y* involves donations to Doctors Without Borders. Obviously, we are given to seeing through the faults in this preference as external observers. *GG* insists that these reservations we have are inconsequential to the reasons for acting so long as the agent finds them to be good. But why does this pose a problem for *GG*?

My question for this subchapter is this: If only the agent's reasons matter, then in what sense is the guise of the good still true if the agent rejects it as guiding their actions? My simple answer is that there is no solution: the problem is insoluble given the standard version of *GG* we have hitherto discussed. My arguments are as follows:

The ontology of intentions is neutral. In support of *GG,* intentions have no problem; against *GG,* intentions still have no problems. When we consider content of intentional actions, we are considering the motivating and justificatory reasons an agent has for acting. We mentioned in the previous subchapter ***2.1*** the case of differing moods and psychological states that impact one's motivations. However, since *GG* places the ultimate weight of reasons on the agent, whatever the agent finds good seems to be the end of the debate as to whether it was in fact a good reason for acting. The issue arises partly because we are not talking about any objectively good reason. So, our agent who decides to eat at Guy Savoy instead of donating to Doctors Without Borders has acted under *GG.*

I would like to offer one **caveat** for this subchapter: I suspend the hypothesis of the agent who acts intentionally but does not think they are acting under *GG.* Under this subchapter, I speak solely of the agent who also believes they are acting under *GG.* We are evaluating the merit of the power given to the agent as the sole person who can justify their actions.

Let us return to the neutrality of the ontology of intentions. Interrogating an agent, *A* why she did an intentional action, *x* we may engage in the following discourse:

Q: *"Why did you save the baby?"*

A: *"I did so because …"*

where the gap is filled with some normative account of the value of life, or her duty to other people, among others. This will be taken as the reasons that support her action, which in turn

will be an action motivated by *GG*. Whether what she says carries the argumentative weight to justify her actions is another debate. But that is not the point. All she needs to do is to acknowledge she has reasons for acting. Whether they are enough is only hers to decide. This is only possible because intentions are neutral, and the weight given to them is the agent's task to decide. Do you now see the problem we are giving rise to?

The problem is that if *A* decides to *φ*, that will constitute an intentional action so long as *A* sees *φ-ing* to be worth doing. Now the content of *φ-ing* may be saving a baby, but also it could be burning the entirety of the Amazon down, or exploding an indefinite amount of nukes across the globe: Raz (2011) has also identified this weakness of the thesis.[17] Now take two agents: *der Führer* Adolf Hitler and civil rights activist Dr Martin Luther King Jr. Both obviously had motivating and justificatory reasons for their actions which history has furnished us. However, given the standard account of *GG,* we can admit they are all acting intentionally. Note! I have not yet made a claim about what guise either of these agents is acting under. I am merely stating two cases of rational agents acting intentionally.

What the last paragraph aimed to illuminate was my suspicion that the ontology of intentions is neutral. This will explain why very (morally/ethically/pragmatically) polar agents can both be acting intentionally on a similar question (i.e., the equality of races, nations and the value of life). The reason why this polarity can occur is that intentions are neutral. The same mental framework is in play when both Hitler and Dr. King are acting. They are both *valuing*. Given *GG,* agents necessarily pursue the good. But *GG* also allows for the agent to be the arbiter of what appears good. The consequence of this power given to the agent is that, very reprehensible motivations and justifications can be admitted as good so long as the agent in question values them.

The issue that arises is that on the one hand agents pursue the good as value. But on the other hand, since agents are the arbiters of value, then very reprehensible things are valued by some agents. Hence, although they are both intentional actions, very disparate things are valued by different agents. This issue of polar intentions is a result of the insistence on the agent as the final arbiter of what counts as good or appears under the aspect of the good. This generates a further problem worth noting: how strong is the connection between *GG* and intentions?

According to Stevenson (1937), the good has a magnetic feature. It attracts, literally. As such, in terms of action theory, rational agents will be necessarily drawn to the good since

[17] In Ch 2 Reasons: Explanatory and Normative, Raz brings similar problems to light.

they are pursuers of value. However, we have noted an asymmetry in the attraction to the good: due to the ontological neutrality of intentions, what appears good to one agent does not appear good to another. Why is this so?

Agency works as a *normative transformer.*[18] This means that what evaluations would otherwise be good to one agent does not appear good to another. A person who just got married has a different psychological state about the value of the institution of marriage as compared to one who just got out of an arduous divorce settlement in court. Same institution, same laws, different agents. But even when we stretch the timeframe for the agent who just got married, we may have the same attitude at a later time *t2* (during divorce) as opposed to their attitude at an earlier time *t1* when they got married. This affirms not only the temporality of intentions and their motivations or justification, but also the neutrality of intentions. It was on this point that I argued that intentions are ontologically neutral, and therefore not committed to any guise, good or bad. Therefore, if intentions are ontologically neutral, it is not obvious why intentions must necessarily be motivated by a particular guise (i.e., *GG*). It is in this light that I reject *GG* as a necessary explanation of intentional actions.

In this Chapter, I argued that *GG* is false as a necessary account of intentional actions. My arguments were twofold: first, that some intentional actions are not motivated by *GG*, and secondly that *GG* cedes too much power to the agent in deciding what counts as good. The case of intentional actions that were not motivated by *GG* challenges the necessary connection that *GG* theorists claim exists between intentions and the good. Focusing on intentions, we realized that agents can also have motivating reasons without justificatory reasons, and vice versa. *GG,* broadly considered, does not factor in this possibility as it assumes that motivating and justificatory reasons are jointly required to account for intentional actions. We learned that an agent could do such and such, understand the action perfectly, but may still not have both motivating or justificatory reasons. On the count of the second objection, too much power to the agent creates a problem of what these justifications truly mean: if anything counts as "good" then what it truly means becomes vague. If not everything agents think is good counts as good, then *GG* must stipulate what exactly this

[18] I borrow this term from Sex, Culture and Justice: The Limits of Choice (Chambers, 2007) (Chambers, 2007). Originally used in gender inequality debates on wage gap, it was meant to claim that the choices of women coincidentally lead to lesser wages. As a consequence of choice, the argument goes, the wage gap was not unjust. In this work, I apply it instead to GG: an action that may not be intentional or good to one agent is intentional and good to another because it is different agents doing the valuing, and moreso, the same agent at different times.

goodness entails. But *GG* is unable to do this because it renders external justifications inconsequential to the agent's reasons. As Stocker (1979) put it, just because someone desired the bad does not magically transform that action or desire to be good. In the next chapter, we will explore what comebacks *GG* may have for our objections.

CHAPTER 3

3 Responses from *GG*

The standard view of action theory draws a necessary relation between *GG* and intentions. In Chapter 2, we rejected this necessary connection because some intentional actions are not motivated by *GG,* even according to the agents who act intentionally. Also, because *GG* gives too much power to the agent, it becomes difficult to account for contradictions in agents' accounts of justification and whether they are good at all. The *GG* theorist might however respond in the following ways:

1. A rational agent can still make a mistake. Such mistakes do not invalidate their intention to pursue the worthy whenever they desire to act rationally. Hence rational agents can still act under another guise (due to Akrasia, for instance).
2. "Rational agent" is used generically for actors of intentional action: it is a description of who people who act intentionally are.

Response (1) aims at my objection 1 which claimed: that some intentional actions are not motivated by *GG.* This was levelled against the position that *GG* is necessary to explain intentional actions.

Response (2) aims at my objection 2 which claimed: that *GG* emphasis on only the agent's reasons weakens the theory. This was levelled against the position that only the agents reasons count.

Let us take a closer look at what these comebacks have to say about our arguments.

3.1 Response 1: *GG* and Other Guises

Many reasons exist for why people act. In our example of the driver who turned left to the motel on the highway, we could offer biological, mechanical, and legal reasons for turning leftward. But not all reasons are sufficient to explain why the agent in fact turned leftward. According to the *GG* theorist, the reasons that count are the ones the agent values as good. For our driver, this reason will be the desire to have some food and rest.

Since the good must (of necessity) attract, intentional action under any guise is not only improbable (if at all it can be shown), but also strange to be understood. Simply put, there cannot exist any such thing as intentional action that is not done *sub ratione boni* (Aquinas, *Summa* 1a 2ae; 8, 1). Hence, whatever guise that there exists outside *GG* (if at all

it is demonstrated), it will not have the magnetic feature of *GG*. The reason why other guises will not have a magnetic feature is that such guises will lack justification for their so-called "intentional actions."

What is necessary is not showing a few problematic actions but rather demonstrating that clear cases of actions exist that are intentional but not motivated by *GG*. A weaker version of saying this goes thus: at least some *de re* justification is necessarily required to act. *See* Velleman (1996). If a person claims to have acted intentionally and is unable to give a justification for their actions, they will be strange to us. In the weakest of forms, some justification however shaky lends credence to the intentionality of the action. Unless there exist some justifications that explain why an action was done, it is hard to take people seriously anyway. We want to justify our actions not only to ourselves but to others; and them, us. Justifications need not be total or absolute; people can have reservations about the merit of their actions. People frequently recalibrate their justifications as and when they see more reasons to trust in such reasons that compel them to act intentionally. This certainly lends more credence to the importance of justifications in acting intentionally. It does not limit or weaken *GG*.

3.2 Response 2: Diminutions in Mental States

Secondly, tampered mental states can impact zeal and rational agency. There is the likelihood of attractions from other guises. Also, it is not unlikely for different attractions to come from the good. In our example of the person who wishes to either eat at Guy Savoy as opposed to donations to Doctors Without Borders, both are seen as good by the agent. Obviously, treating oneself with some good food is not generally bad. It is only when several considerations such as price and alternative actions are factored in that it becomes extravagant, but that will still not make it bad.

In this case, an agent has a desire to act but a competing desire to donate to charity also exists. Pragmatic considerations, *desiring to desire* (i.e., the desire to pursue another desire for an action), pain and distractions can make agents choose the less valuable good, even under the same guise. There is an Akan proverb that goes thus, "*Nsatea nyinaa nnyɛ pɛ"* (transliterated, *Not All fingers are same*).[19] Not all justifications are the same either. One

[19] The Akans are an ethnic group along the coasts of West Africa (Ghana and Ivory Coast), with languages traceable to immigrants of the Ancient Ghana Empire who seem to have settled – if the Arabian chronicler Al Bakri is to be believed – from about the 11th Century AD.

could be just a bit more compelling than the other as when we choose between two places we want to visit. For instance, a statistician on a holiday in Las Vegas will still gamble against their better judgement, all the while experimenting with the Ten Commandments. In such moments, she does not lose her mathematical prowess; she is merely pursuing pleasure. These are also strong attractions. At worst, she will be making mistakes; at best, *GG* is not in a profit and loss column on a spreadsheet. These attractions may not be as justified as their alternatives but may still be strong attractions to reckon with. *"Le matin je fais des projets, et le soir je fait des sottises"* – in the morning I resolve, but in the evenings I commit follies. Yet this does not invalidate her intention to pursue the good whenever she desires to.

The reason why an agent's weakness does not invalidate her intentional actions as motivated by *GG* is that rationality is only an aspect of their mental faculties. In their right state of mind, whenever they act intentionally, it is their reasons for acting that count. This position sits well with the claim that only the agent's reasons count. Showing moments of bad decisions (as objection 2 sought to do) is not sufficient to disprove the claim that whenever the agent in their right state of mind acts intentionally, they are pursuing the good.

3.3 Response 1, continued: Akrasia

Akrasia, or weakness of will, occurs when one acts against their better judgement due to loss of control. As rational agents, this happens to us also due to diminutions in mental states and attractions of other guises. Akrasia is not impossible for the rational agent. [For an extended debate on this, see Davidson (1970)].[20]

It is not impossible to see Akrasia as rational given some considerations. For instance, in the Biblical story of the patriarch Abraham (then Abram), we are told that on arrival in Egypt to escape famine the Pharaoh enquired about his wife from the old patriarch. Fearing for his people and his wife, he merely acted as though she was his sister. See in Genesis 12:10-20 (English Standard Version, 2001). Did he think lying was wrong? He must have, considering his acute sense of honour and uprightness, even occasionally reminding his God of the principles of morality (Genesis 18:16-33).[21] This picture of a steadfast, uncompromising man on truth is what we get of Abraham throughout the Biblical narratives. Even Kantians will occasionally allow for the hypothetical imperative. Such moments do

[20] Also cf. Bratman (1979), Tenenbaum (1999), Arpaly (2000), and Stroud (2003).
[21] He is said to have petitioned God about having mercy on sinners when God was bent on destroying an entire city for sexual and other religiously forbidden acts.

not make the agents irrational per se. Rather, akrasia sheds newer light on why one may yet be rational in moments of acting against their better knowledge and judgement.

3.4 Response 2, continued: "Rational Agents" as Generic

One often wonders what this talk of rational agent so far has been. Setiya (2010) has identified the problem with seeing rational agents as a distinct entity instead of an aspect of the human person. As Orsi (*forthcoming*) points out, when we speak of the rational agent, we are not talking about a specie type, but merely a description of what human beings do when they act intentionally.[22]

Reasons for acting, which is what you get when you ask an agent for the "why" of an action, are what makes an action rational, or in other words intelligible. "Rational agents" fits seamlessly on "humans" since our debate has thus far centred on what real people do in the world. If these real people were unable to rationalise to themselves and to their interlocutor any justification for an action they call intentional, they will strike us as very odd people indeed. "Rational agents" as a description summarises for us what defines an entity that acts deliberately in ways they can understand. In other words, when we speak of rational agents it is the mental states of these agents we speak of (Audi, 2001). The reason why people can be akratic, desire weakly, have competing attractions, etc is because they are other things apart from just rational agents. They are not robots with direct feedback on a specific stimulus: the sportsman who drinks may also be a bartender who enjoys nightclubs. Enjoying alcohol does not make him any less of a sportsman, or a rational agent. Hence, objection 2 misfires if it aims at merely presenting situations in which people act badly.

In the chapter that follows, we will test these comebacks against our arguments that we laid out in Chapter 2. First we will take a short detour through some examples and experiments.

[22] This is expressed more succinctly in the introduction to his forthcoming work that aims at providing a historical trace of *GG*.

CHAPTER 4

4 Response to Counterarguments from GG

In Chapter 3, we explored some comebacks and possible solutions that *GG* theorists might give regarding the arguments raised in Chapter 2. The arguments raised in Chapter 2 were twofold: first, *GG* is not necessary in explaining intentional actions because we can demonstrate a contingent relationship between intentions and *GG.* The nature of intentions itself can allow for intentional actions with weak or no justifications, and intentional actions that the agents do not believe were done *sub specie boni.* The second concern was that *GG* gives too much power to the agent. The nature of agency makes justification dubious while questioning what we truly mean by the good when we say rational agents are always attracted by it. The comebacks from *GG* in Chapter 3 included: that attractions from other guises, akrasia, and diminutions in mental states can impact rational agency without posing any significant risk to *GG.* Secondly, because *GG* merely describes an aspect of people as rational agents, it is not fair to assume that it implies the impossibility of acting under other guises or choosing questionable motivations. This Chapter is dedicated to responding to the counterarguments from *GG*.

Let us first consider some cases and experiments:

4.1 Experiments and Cases

a) Roeber has been running since morning. Robert stops him and asks why he is gallivanting. He explains that he has received an injection from his doctor, Laura. Laura admits that the injection can cause people to be hyperactive.

b) Nada went hiking with her colleagues. In a nearby cave, they get stuck when the entrance is sealed by some tremor. After unsuccessful rescue attempts, they decided to eat the flesh of any one of them who is selected by lot. They are all unwilling to kill since "Killing is morally wrong if one is not defending themselves against an immediate threat from an attacker". Like Buridan's Ass, Nada (and eight friends) dies of starvation three days before rescue. [23]

[23] This is my adaptation of *The Case of the Speluncean Explorers* by Fuller (1949). It is a hypothetical case, set in the year 4299: Roger Whetmore who was part of the trapped people in a cave is killed by his colleagues when it takes too long to rescue them. Killing him was a survival strategy suggested by the victim via casting

In (a) Roeber knows what he is doing yet cannot help but run. He does not have to, and he knows. This is in support of objection 2: that too much power is given to the agent. In (b), Nada does not act at all since she claims she does not have justification. This is in support of objection 1: that *GG* is not necessary for explaining intentional action. How do these adumbrate the debates we have encountered around *GG*?

Before we proceed with our response to Chapter 3 via our experiments and cases, let us briefly recall the argument that we are rejecting. The formal argument for GG that we are rejecting is of the form:

P1 If an action *x* is intentional, then the agent *A* understands why she did *x*.

P2 If *A* understands why she did *x*, then *A* has her justificatory reasons for doing *x*.

P3 If *A* has her justificatory reasons for doing *x,* then *A* sees *x* under *GG*.

C Therefore, if an action *x* is intentional, then *A* sees *x* under *GG*.

4.2 The Case of Intentional Actions that agents do not have justifications for

I argue in this subchapter the possibility of intentional actions that agents do not have justifications for. In the Chapter 2, we encountered the possibility of acting only on motivating reasons. In such moments that this happens, agents can later feel shame because they yielded to motivations which lacked justification. In our example of Roeber above, the justification for running is lacking since he understands he does not have to run. However P1 makes it clear that it is sufficient for an action to be intentional if they necessarily understand what they are doing.

I argue that it is possible to understand what one is doing without having intentions towards it (contrary to *P1*). Let us consider the case of Roeber running along the streets of South Bend. Roeber is aware of what he is doing. He even explains intelligibly to Robert why he is running. It turns out Dr Laura's injection makes one hyperactive. Did Roeber, from the look of things, want to run? No. Given what we have discussed so far about intentions, it does not seem that if I do not initiate an action deliberately then I intended to

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of lots, except he was unlucky and got selected. Facing the moral dilemma of killing or dying, they chose to kill and survive on human flesh. Rescued, they face trial and the philosophical implications of murder ensue in court.

My adaptation is aimed at the opposite outcome: the situation where nobody gets killed because they believe killing to be wrong. As expected, they all die due to starvation. The aim of this adaptation is to assess whether in the practical world people hold on to their justificatory grounds to act, or when they lack such justifications, they do not act at all like Buridan's Ass. Jean Buridan (c. 1301-1362) illustrated with a story how a starving ass placed precisely midway between hay and water simply dies of starvation because it does not decide which to take: water or hay.

do it. Yet, because *P1* ties my understanding of the action as necessarily connected to the action being intentional, it appears *GG* will have us accept Roeber as having acted intentionally: a classic case of contradiction.

Objection: Not at all, a *GG* theorist might rebut. What has been shown is rather a case of denial of the antecedent: if an action is intentional, then the agent understands why they did it; but that is not the same as if an agent understands why they did *x*, then the action *x* is intentional.

Response: To this I say: true, *GG* places intentional action as sufficient and intelligibility of the action by understanding as necessary. Fair enough. Yet, the relationship that exists between intentional action and understanding is not one of causality but that of constitution. Suppose I said, '*If it rains, then the ground will be wet'* and someone counters by saying "*the ground is wet, but it did not rain outside*", then they will be guilty of the suspicion of the *GG* theorist. They would be arguing in reverse by wrongly affirming the consequent. On the contrary, for statements whose consequent is constituted in the antecedent, this suspicion is moot: If I told someone '*If you are a bachelor, then you are an unmarried man*,' I do not mean being a bachelor causes one to be an unmarried man. Being an unmarried man is constituted in bachelorship. So, the challenge I raised has nothing to do with causation per se. This is in line with my critique on the necessary connection between understanding an action and intending it. The relationship that *GG* places between the two is one of constitution: part of what it means to have intended some action is that one understands why they are doing it. Of course, this includes whether you can account for it on the one hand; on the other hand, it can include whether it is deliberate.

GG does not specify which of the two it sticks with. In this regard, P1 seems to admit of the first sense: if an action is intentional, then the agent can understand why they did it, or it is intelligible. However, in light of P3, the action ought to also be justified by the agent. But these two propositions (although they not contradictory) are not compatible with each other, as we have noted. Roeber perfectly understands what he is doing although he will not admit it as having justification. Like Diogenes, we have a featherless biped who is not a human being; we have an unmarried man who is not a bachelor, just as we have an action that is understood without it counting as intentional.[24] We have someone who understands

[24] If the rendition Diogenes Laertius gives us (in his Βίοι καὶ γνῶμαι τῶν ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ εὐδοκιμησάντων) is to be believed, our edge-lord philosopher of Athens (also Diogenes) hearing Plato's definition of "man" as a "featherless animal" decided to pluck chicken and present it at The Academy saying: "Behold! A man." Plato corrected the definition by adding "...with broad flat nails." See in Laertius (1972), ISBN 978-0-674-99204-7.

what they are doing and why, without the action counting as intentional action. Roeber is to be taken as acting intentionally because he understood why he was acting, but at the same time Roeber the rational agent will reject such an action as an intentional action from him: just because he could understand it was not enough.[25]

4.3 To Act or Not to Act, that is the Question

You do not need a justification to act intentionally. In case (c) (i.e., under *Experiments and Cases* in *subchapter 4.1*), Nada and her colleagues died because they required justification. My aim in this story is to drive a wedge in *GG*'s convictions about the need for justifications before we can act. Do people truly behave this way? I must admit, first, that such an examination will require extra work in behavioural psychology, among others, to form a proper theory along the lines of what I am suggesting. So, this strand of argument I am about to give must be taken advisedly.

Whenever rational agents are confronted with circumstances in which they lack justification to act, they do not desist from acting. They instead act without justification. In the air crash case of the **Uruguayan Airforce flight 571** (which happened on October 13th, 1972), we find that survivors had decided to eat the deceased on board. Devout Catholics though they were, they saw no obstruction to doing something that they did not just see any justification for, but also what they believed to be totally unjustified. As one survivor recalls, "...we wondered whether we were going mad to contemplate such a thing...or was this the only sane thing to do?"[26] Obviously, they were conscious of what they were doing. Their judgement was not impaired, for they expressed some guilt in the act. Though extreme, this example and similar others lead to the same conclusion: wherever it has been tried, the result of this experiment has been the same – act intentionally without justification.

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[25] As both reviewers (Uku Tooming and James Pearson) rightly point out, the relationship between understanding an intentional action *x* and "intentional action" itself is **not** *analytic a priori*: that is to say, they are not true by definition and knowledge of them is not formal. I however interpret it as *analytic a posteriori* : P1 makes the relationship between intentions and understanding *x* seem true by definition, but P3 makes our knowledge of the relationship between intentions an *GG* something based on the fact of the agent seeing the action as motivated by *GG.*

Orsi (2015: 715) hinted this when he mentions that "…[*GG*] is held to be more than a contingent generalisation about human beings." The possibility of the *metaphysical a posteriori* was hinted by Aquinas when he mentions the *actus purus,* translated as 'activity per se' to show how a wholly immaterial God interacts with a material world. See in *Summa Theologiae,* P. I. QQ. II, III, IV.; also, in *Contra Gentiles* (2010) L. I, c. XIII XVI.

[26] See here. The video tape from which this quote was extracted is protected and hence I am unable to share. However, quotes from the survivors including the one stated above can be found in the link provided. This is another place to read more.

One interpretation that a *GG* theorist might give is that people always do not need to give away their justifications. Put differently, justifications do not need to be laid out formally as if it were a scientific or mathematical theory. What makes agents themselves important is the primacy of their accounts and the rights reserved to them to make such justifications for their actions.

One **objection** to the air-crash example I foresee is this: the rational agents have justification for acting. They just do not acknowledge it or know it while they are acting. In a way, everyone who acts intentionally can offer us their normative reasons even if it is an afterthought. Post-hoc rationalisation (i.e., rationalisations after the fact) of actions is not difficult to be invoked by rational agents. Rationalisation of the action after the fact may still be as legitimate as during the act.

Response: While this is in principle possible, it affords *GG* no real solution. We remember from Chapter 1 that actions are rational so far as the agents understood why they did them. Moreover, justifications spring from the agent in question: it is their normative reasons that justify an action. This makes different justifications incommensurable. In other words, there is no standard/metric by which to judge the justifications of an agent B from agent A besides the fact that they both believe their reasons to justify their actions. This was important for *GG* since it exempts us from applying objective standards of justification.

Yet *GG* suggests the possibility of likely justifications that the agent does not know. It even stretches as far as "wrong facts" that agents believed are a proper justification of their actions [See Parfit (2001); Alvarez (2010)]. This includes the so-called "mistake of fact" such as pouring the wrong solution on your itching eye as we encountered earlier. The problem with this is that while we can concede to all of these technicalities, *GG* will still have to explain what I call *Ineffable* (i.e. unthought of, unutterable) *Justifications*. What exactly is an **ineffable justification**?

We learned that the motivations and justifications of actions are the causal origins of intentional action. In this sense, it must precede the action itself. Literally, if A causes B, then A must occur before B unless the relationship is biconditional, i.e., they cause (and are caused by) each other.[27] It cannot be that A causes B when A is merely detected after B has occurred. In other words, A cannot be the cause of B if we do not find A occurring prior to

[27] In a biconditional relationship, if A relates to B biconditionally, then A causes B and B causes A. See p. 426 of *A Concise Introduction to Logic* (Hurley, 2015).

B in a timeline. This will be a questionable causal relationship. In addition to this, only the agent's motivating or justificatory reasons count.

If the justificatory and explanatory reasons for acting depend on the agent, and if it is possible still for the agent to not know or have these justifications at the time of acting, then my question is: what is the difference between a justification that is unthought of, unutterable, unheard of, (simply put, ***ineffable justifications***) ... and no justification at all? If the *GG* theorist wishes to be faithful to the standard view which has hitherto been discussed, then *ineffable justifications* must have no place in their assessment of such cases. Another explanation must be given by the *GG* theorist why we can override an agent's justification. It will be incoherent for the *GG* theorist to appeal to *ineffable justifications* to explain cases where agents reject any form of justification for their actions.

So-called rational agents do not behave like Buridan's Ass, and Nada (like the colleagues of Roger Whetmore in *The Case of the Speluncean Explorers*) will act without justification. As to whether the justifications are hidden and unknown, *GG* theorists will have to explain how they come to the knowledge of these *ineffable justifications.* When they have done so, they will have to also explain how they are not committing the very error they have advised against: that only the agent can properly uncover her justificatory reasons for acting, and our evaluations of its merits are not central and necessary to its intelligibility.

4.4 Perverse Agents and the Good

It is very easy to imagine people who act for specific bad reasons. Satan behaves in ways that seem to satisfy our curiosity about people acting intentionally for reasons that are anything but good. There are cases where people act in ways that are neither good nor bad but just strange: Don Quixote*,* Anscombe's saucer of mud, Münchhausen's adventures, Voltaire's Pangloss. There is the kind of agent who can be flicking a light bulb out of mischievousness or weak justifications such as what Jack [In (Golding, 1954) *Lord of the Flies*] says of his candidacy for chief: "*...I can sing C sharp*" (page 28). These are not problematic for *GG* per se.

Some *GG* advocates suggest that it is the pleasure that is derived from acting for bad reasons that the agents act (Cf: Tenenbaum (2008) and Tappolet (2009)). But this is not precisely what is in question. I speak of the agent who admittedly acts for bad reasons just because they are bad, the kind of agent Raz (2002) mentions. Satan may enjoy mischief, but if the same pleasure were to be derived from good, will he do the good? Likely not. Just

because agents understood why they did so (for those bad reasons) does not magically turn their actions into actions done under *GG*. If acting intelligibly for bad reasons makes it an action under *GG*, then this is a strange guise indeed. Imagine that I act based on motivations I think are bad; the mere fact that I value doing the bad things means (according to *GG*) that those actions were done under some aspect of the good. Now, also imagine that I act on motivations that I believe are good: the mere fact that I value doing those good things means (according to *GG*) that I acted under some aspect of the good. But these two situations are inconsistent with each other.

Acting for bad reasons does not make those actions good (Stocker, 1979). Note, however, whether those actions are in fact good or bad is not what is in dispute here. It is not difficult to hear people say, "Yes, I know what I am doing is not right, but I want to do it anyway." Each of us has said it at least once in our lifetime. This seems to be exactly the opposite of what Plato's Socrates believes about rational agents: if you know the good, you will do the good and as such bad actions are the result of ignorance (*Protagoras* 358d), restated in the Kantian impossibility of a diabolical will. Yet we have learned that not only do people act this way, but also intentionally about it. These are not exceptions to *GG*.

If humans act intentionally, and "rational agent" is just a description of a mental state prior to intentional action (as *GG*'s Response 2 affirmed), then "rational agent" as such cannot be taken to be an actor! As a description (and as such lacking the force of necessity binding on all humans), it cannot be generic over practical actions done by humans. What I mean is this; if I describe a feature of mammals as having fur, it remains a mere description. Now given that mammals have fur and animals with fur coincidentally have spleens, one cannot draw a necessary relationship between having fur and having a spleen. It just so happens that most animals who have fur also have spleens, but there is no rule here to make that connection necessary.

The simple reason is that we are *describing* animals with fur (and having a spleen is common among animals with fur): a spleen happens to be one other feature of such animals, hence drawing a tight connection between having fur and spleens will be unprincipled, as it is not a necessary connection. Similarly, that humans can act rationally and whenever they act rationally, we observe them valuing the good does not remotely suggest that this relationship is necessary or must hold even under normal circumstances.

CHAPTER 5

5 Conclusion

The Guise of the Good (*GG*) is an account of action theory according to which all intentional actions are those done by agents who believed it to be motivated by the good. The emergence of *GG* in the 70s following the works of Anscombe (1963), Stocker (1979) and others is due to its attractions.

In **Chapter 1**, I explained that *GG* makes impressive efforts to close the gap between desires and action. Why do we act morally or believe our justifications to account for why we did anything? The answer is simply because we thought it was good. Hume had created an insoluble disconnect between our beliefs which have an evaluative content and our desires which do not have an evaluative content. *GG* resolves this by arguing that desires in fact entail evaluative content. More than this, *GG* shows that the weight of justification can be dependent on the agent solely. This makes the theory flexible and attractive. The standard account of *GG* with which this essay was argued was of the form:

P1 If an action *x* is intentional, then the agent *A* understands why she did *x*.

P2 If *A* understands why she did *x*, then *A* has her justificatory reasons for doing *x*.

P3 If *A* has her justificatory reasons for doing *x,* then *A* sees *x* under *GG*.

C Therefore, if an action *x* is intentional, then *A* sees *x* under *GG*.

In **Chapter 2**, I argued why I believe *GG* fails. My arguments were twofold: that *GG* gives too much power to the agent; and that *GG* is not necessary for explaining intentional actions. If it were necessary then the cases of intentional actions that are not motivated by *GG* would not arise. Secondly, the agents themselves can lack justifications sometimes and still believe they acted intentionally. On the one hand, *GG* is willing to give the right to decide what counts as good to the agent whereas, on the other hand, it is uncomfortable with the possibility of perverse agents. The agent that acts specifically for bad reasons poses such a significant threat to *GG* that some theorists argue to the effect that these perverse agents desire the pleasures from the bad. However, this is contrary to the spirit of the account which gives full right to the agent to decide what motivates them. If the agent desires the bad, it becomes disingenuous for the *GG* theorist to suddenly argue that what the agent means by "bad" is actually "good."

In **Chapter 3**, I introduced two comebacks that *GG* theorists often level against criticisms at the theory. These comebacks included that agents can make mistakes. They of course are not infallible entities. Also, there can be akratic moments where attractions from other guises and *GG* can weaken desires. Hence, a mere demonstration of examples of agents who acted intentionally but claim to not have done so under *GG* does not invalidate the necessary connection between *GG* and intentional action. The comebacks were:

1. A rational agent can still make a mistake and act under another guise (due to Akrasia, for instance).
2. "Rational agent" is used generically for actors of intentional action: it is a description of people who act intentionally.

Response (1) was aimed at Objection (2), i.e., that too much power to the agent threatens *GG*. Response (2) was aimed at Objection (1), i.e., that *GG* is not necessary for explaining intentional action.

In **Chapter 4**, we weighed the responses in Chapter 3 against some thought experiments and real-life examples to see if they held water. What became apparent was that the objections raised in Chapter 2 had not been adequately resolved by the responses in Chapter 3. For instance, our charge of too much power to the agent was attempted by *GG* using the possibility of post-hoc justifications, or justifications after the fact of the action. I responded that the cause of an action cannot, by definition, occur after the action has occurred. In addition to this, it sneaks behind the authority given to the agent as the final arbiter of the justificatory weight of their actions. It was as if *GG* gave the agent a blank check to an account which has no money in it. If agents can act without knowing these justifications at all, then there is no distinction between these "unknown justifications" (*ineffable justifications,* as I call them) and no justification at all. In response to *GG*'s comeback that the term "rational agent" is merely a description, I argued that descriptions over any sample of humans lack the force of necessity. This was in support of Objection 1 which I had already argued in Chapter 2.

For such reasons, *GG* is false as a necessary explanation of intentional action.

5.1 Further Research and Recommendations

As I earlier noted above while explaining the air crash case, further work into the science of behavioural psychology is required in order to form a fuller understanding of action theory that is not merely limited to an analysis of terms but the fuller scientific

literature on motivations, the psychology of desires, and corresponding actions that follow from such desires.

Among philosophers, Setiya (2010) already hinted at the possibility of separating motivating reasons from justificatory reasons since both are not jointly required in order to act intentionally. Much of the counter-examples available in the arsenal of opponents of *GG* largely draw inspiration from such weakness. It is only enough for an action to have motivating reasons: justificatory reasons may only strengthen its normative weight but not make it less of an intentional action. *See* Velleman (2003).

Further, a specification of the content of intentions and the good must be properly spelt out. If the good is taken to be merely an aesthetic quality, then it has different implications from moral and pragmatic considerations. But why is this really important?

Moral good and aesthetic good does not always coincide. Pragmatic good and deontological good do not coincide either. I mean to say, an action that is good because it is motivated by beauty may not imply the same weight as what is good because it is life-sustaining, good or dangerous. For instance it was thought by Hitler that exterminating *the other* was good for Germany: but this good did not coincide with the moral good. Perhaps we can be charitable to *GG* in some way.

We can be charitable to *GG* given that the subject of its enquiry is extremely complicated and diverse. No description of humans ever fits over time. Not only are we talking about a biologically diverse population, but also a population with intriguing motivations, cultures and values. Maybe the difficulty that emerges with *GG* simply highlights the nuances that exist in the category of entities that it is describing. Among anthropologists, very few generalisations are made due to the awareness of vast normative and descriptive differences between cultures however similar they may appear. Perhaps a cue could be taken from such disciplines in order to provide a fitting caveat for discussing intentions to avoid the common mistakes that we make in defining and categorising large numbers of diverse individuals.

Finally, it is not also too clear whether *GG* is committed to a descriptive or prescriptive task of accounting for practical actions. On some occasions, it is as if an "ought" argument is being heavily drawn. This is broadly the reason why it keeps insisting on a jointly sufficient motivating cum justificatory reasons for acting before an action can count as intentional action, even though practical cases betray such a postulate. If what makes sense to the agent also is what is justified by the agent, then it is understandable why *GG* puts them together in such a tight relationship. However, there is no reason why this should

be by definition true. Perhaps both could be held together; the only issue is that caveats should be stated to alert the inquirer when and where a descriptive task is being undertaken as opposed to a prescriptive one. This will maintain focus on a specific sense *GG* is being discussed in order to avoid equivocations and arguing past each other.

Abstract

The Guise of the Good thesis explains the nature of intentional action as aimed at accomplishing something that appears good to the agent. According to the Guise of the Good theorist, without the belief that doing such and such leads to preferred results that the agent thinks are good, they would otherwise not act, or they will choose to act differently. This makes sense as an explanation of why people do what they do since we are unlikely to act upon attractions we see no good in – if we are doing so out of our deliberation. The Guise of the Good thesis is distinct in that it distinguishes the practical actions of humans from mere impulses and automated responses. The evaluative content attached to practical actions under the Guise of the Good commits the thesis to being a necessary explanation of intentional action. In a way, the Guise of the Good thesis has become the standard account of action theory.

I argue that it is not the case that whenever we act intentionally, we are acting under the Guise of the Good. The thesis cedes too much power to the agent in justifying the goodness of their action.

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